

ZYGOTE

While medical tagging and robot helicopters provide comfort for Zygoté, he wonders how developments in smell-phone technology will help to protect the contents of his trousers

SCENT PACKING

It was usual in communist East Germany for the Stasi to offer interrogation victims a little cushion to sit on. This was to allow the scent of fear on the cushion covers to be bottled for future reference. For example, scent-data came in very useful if the victim ever had to be tracked by bloodhounds. How good it is to see such traditions kept alive and well by the Hun, with the Polizei using computerised scent-recognition to sniff out known troublemakers at last month's G8 summit.

Meanwhile, across the border in Switzerland, a company called Isabodywear has given away 500 pairs of anti-radiation underpants to gentlemen prepared to fill in an online survey. The pants contain an integrated mesh of metal threads, claimed to protect their reproductive organs from emissions given off by mobile phones carried around in trouser pockets.

Mobile phones have been associated with brain tumours for some time, and presumably the Swiss are trying to prove once and for all that men really do think with their dicks. Unfortunately, when Zygoté attempted to fill in the questionnaire, he did not know the correct Germanic response to "Is that a mobile phone in your pocket or are you just pleased to see me?"

Meanwhile, Motorola has been granted US patent 7200363 for a cellular telephone "with a scent-

emitting package in thermal proximity to an electrical circuit". Zygoté has yet to get his hands on one of these smell-phones, but he sincerely hopes it has been preloaded with a game of Pong. As our German cousins might say, we were only obeying odours.

DRIVING TEST

Speaking of mobile phone fun, Nissan has advised drivers of certain 2007 models not to carry its electronic keys in the same pocket as their phone. A Nissan spokesman admitted that if the new I-Key is too close to a mobile phone during an incoming call, the radio frequency emission can wipe its memory.

With an amnesiac key, central locking may not work and car boots can refuse to open. Worse than that, according to Nissan, the car won't start and the I-Key cannot be reprogrammed. Owners are being notified of the problem by email, and a new pattern of keyless-entry device will be available later in the year.

So that's all right, then. Just tell the traffic warden that your phone refuses to let you drive off until the autumn. Now that wardens have had their brains replaced by time-stamp cameras, they are bound to sympathise.

WATCHING THE SKIES

Zygoté thinks those spy-drones on Merseyside are a bit feeble. When

they spot a homicidal terrorist letting his pit bull crap round the back of Anfield, all they can do is swoop low and make their rotor-blades tousle his hair, or maybe blow specks of grit in the dog's eye. Where's the computerised vengeance in that?

We have to look towards America to see some half-decent gunships in action. Ever since one of Uncle Sam's deathbots escorted Qu'ed Sunyan al-Harethi's armoured Toyota through the gates of paradise, the development of the Fire Scout robot helicopter has proceeded with all speed. The US Navy is looking to deploy two hundred of the buggers some time next year in the vicinity of Iraq, in much the same spirit that Herr Hitler hoped drone-flying bombs would defeat the enemy after all else had failed.

The Fire Scout can stay aloft for half a day, guided by GPS navigation, stereo cameras, motion sensors and targeting lasers, while its computers decide who might benefit from the payload of the 70mm Hydra rockets and Hellfire missiles on board. Even though the cost of each deathbot would keep a city clinic going for three years, they are far less trouble. Nobody gives a damn about scrap metal being brought home in a body bag, and it is highly impractical to bung a machine in the dock to face prosecution for war crimes.

BAND AID

The wearing of coloured wristbands can indicate all sorts of things. White bands support the Make Poverty History campaign, camouflage bands express approval for the War On Terror, elasticated beige bands indicate repetitive strain injury, and so on.

Twenty-five quid may seem a bit much for a rubber band, but that's the cost of the new Zaptag rubber band with its embedded 256MB memory stick. You could carry around all sorts of useful files on a Zaptag, but the main idea is to wear a digitised record of your entire medical history at all times, in case of emergency. Not a bad idea when you are found gibbering in the gutter and the paramedics need to know if you are suffering from diabetes or if you are simply old. In fact, web-savvy silver surfers are already being encouraged to take their wristbands along to the GP and get their medical records downloaded.

So far, responses have been positive. Some time next month, silver surfers are set to become the largest demographic age group represented online, and their embrace of the web comes from all social and economic brackets. Pensioners subsisting on meagre incomes, old folk with substantial savings to supplement their lifestyles and those who carry on working way past retirement age are all flocking online as if there were no tomorrow, which in the case of the very old there probably isn't. But the Zaptag may help them to fend off the Grim Reaper, and Zygoté is all for that.

Speaking of mortal deadlines, Zygoté will be zapping these words to the editorial desk just as soon as he can remember what his password is. It was saved on that nice little rubber band they put on his wrist, but it seems to have fallen off. Nurse? Nurse! ☑

Great Moments in Computing © 1988-2007 Mel Croucher and Robin Grenville-Evans 235: THE SLIDE RULE



The slide rule calculator was invented by William Oughtred in 1625. It was made of ivory and was the first hand-held computer



The design lasted until 1973, when boffins at Hewlett-Packard introduced the electronic slide rule



Slide Rule Number One: always estimate the end result before embarking on the actual procedure.